

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS KUWAIT 005231

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: DECL: N/A

TAGS: PREL MOPS US KU

SUBJECT: Erroneous GOK Press Statement Regarding Accident

Near Bubiyan Island

(U) SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

¶1. (SBU) This afternoon the Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior issued a press statement (text in paragraph 3 below) regarding a naval incident that took place near Bubiyan Island this morning in which one American and one Kuwait received minor injuries. The MOI statement contains information that differs markedly from our understanding of the events. Specifically, the statement claims that the incident occurred near Warba Island (north of Bubiyan) and that a Kuwaiti vessel came under fire from an Iraqi vessel. Our understanding, based on information provided by a US military source, is that the incident actually occurred in the Khor as-Subiyah, west of Bubiyan, well inside Kuwaiti waters, that there was no (repeat no) Iraqi involvement at all and that no shots were fired.

¶2. (SBU) According to our source, the incident was a simple accident. Three Kuwaiti naval boats were taking some American Special Forces personnel to survey a possible future bed-down site on Bubiyan Island. Two boats were in the lead with one behind. For reasons unknown, the first two boats stopped. The driver of the third was not paying close enough attention and ran into the back of one of the other boats. In the collision two people were lightly injured, an American (who was medevaced to Camp Doha where he received 12 stitches for a laceration on his head) and a Kuwaiti (who received some broken bones).

¶3. (SBU) Unfortunately, initial reports were considerably more alarming than this information and quickly spread into the media (at one point it was said that two people shot had been shot in the head). Perhaps to dampen this kind of sensational reporting, the Ministry of Interior issued the following statement (informal embassy translation):

BEGIN TEXT OF EMBASSY TRANSLATION OF MOI STATEMENT

A security source at the Ministry of Interior stated that on the morning of Tuesday, December 3, 2002, while two coast guard boats were on a routine patrol in the Northern region, close to Warba island, when an Iraqi boat happened to be in the region and opened fire on them (two Kuwaiti coast guard boats). No injuries resulted from the shooting except for the collision of the two Kuwaiti boats, which took place during the shooting. This led to the very slight injury of one of the elements as a result of the collision.

END TEXT

¶4. (SBU) Embassy and CFLCC PAO's have spent the afternoon fending off press queries based on the MOI statement. To this point we have declined to substantiate anything in the statement. However, local press has also picked up the news that an American was involved (not mentioned in the MOI statement). While we have not confirmed this, we believe that the US will have no choice but to acknowledge soon that an American was injured, albeit lightly, in the collision. At this stage, we recommend Washington press guidance confirm an incident but decline to provide any details until we have a chance to look into the matter more fully with the GOK. Above all, we should not suggest that we have any reason to believe that there is any Iraqi involvement at this time.

¶5. (SBU) PAO spoke with the chief military public affairs of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense this evening, who said that he had advised the Ministry of the Interior not to accuse the Iraqis of opening fire on the Kuwaiti vessels, but that his advice went unheeded. PAO warned this contact that the story was being reported in the international media and had the potential of damaging Kuwait's credibility. PAO urged this official, a general officer in the Kuwaiti military, to ask his colleagues in the Ministry of Interior to issue a new statement backing away from their original assertion of Iraqi involvement. The contact told us that he would recommend to the MOI that they issue a new statement saying that the original reports of Iraqi gunfire might have been inaccurate.

JONES